

# **The Larissa Experiment**

**by Nella Golanda  
Urban Landscape Sculptor**

**Total Art operations for the reestablishment in urban life of the wider  
natural and historical landscape 1992 – 2006 Larissa**

Larissa is an ancient riverside town in the middle of the fertile plain of Thessaly. Its timeless habitation is lost in the mists of history. Major floods of the Pinios river led to its (90%) diversion in the 1930s, an action that had as a consequence the loss of the riverside – city character.

In addition, in the spring of 1941, after the bombing and the big earthquake which followed almost immediately, the city was destroyed and lost all her characteristics, becoming a sad city.

Living my childhood there, I heard people like my parents describing with great passion the city they knew and the landscapes they loved in their childhood as Larissa adjoins the Olympus mountain, the Pelion of the Centaurs and the vast plain of Thessaly.

The lost link of the city with the mythical Pinios river which flows almost horizontally in Greece, almost from the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea where it empties, passing through the plains of Thessaly and the Tempe Gorge to the foothills of the Olympus mountain, where, as they believed in ancient Greece, the water nymphs lived. This mythical element passed on stories and our childhood tales.

I remember its inhabitants strove for a creative emergence through the ashes of the city by learning with great passion its music and history through their contact with its historical and natural landscapes. My father used to say that we live on an archaeological palimpsest. His words were engraved in my childhood memory.

In the 1980s the municipal authority, having at the head the great reformer city Mayor, Aristides Lambroulis, decided the archaeological excavation of the residential hill located in the city center in order to discover the magnificent ancient theater of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, as big as the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

In this fertile atmosphere of human resources, trying to shake off the designation of one of the ugliest-neutral cities in Greece, the Mayor asked me at the end of that decade "to design squares in my hometown as well." The emergence of the Ancient Theatre in the city center led me to suggest the reconnection of the city of Larissa with its lost natural and historical landscape and in particular with the flow of its great river, Pinios, which flows from remote mountain mouth through the fertile plain and ravines of the Olympus mountain towards its end at the Aegean Sea. The central idea of the design would be the flow of the great river - the "Sculptured Larissa River", the three recurrences in the center with local recycling of large quantities of water leading to the excavated Ancient Theatre.

The two major central city squares (more than 13.000 m<sup>2</sup>) are 150 meters apart and another 150 meters from the Ancient Theater. They are characterized by a comprehensive urban landscape intervention, which enables the city of Larissa to welcome the revealed Ancient Theatre, by using a structured urban center, where various rhythms and qualities have the possibility to develop, “in the river’s flow”, through total design interventions, in a large-scale, a spatial natural and historical landscape.

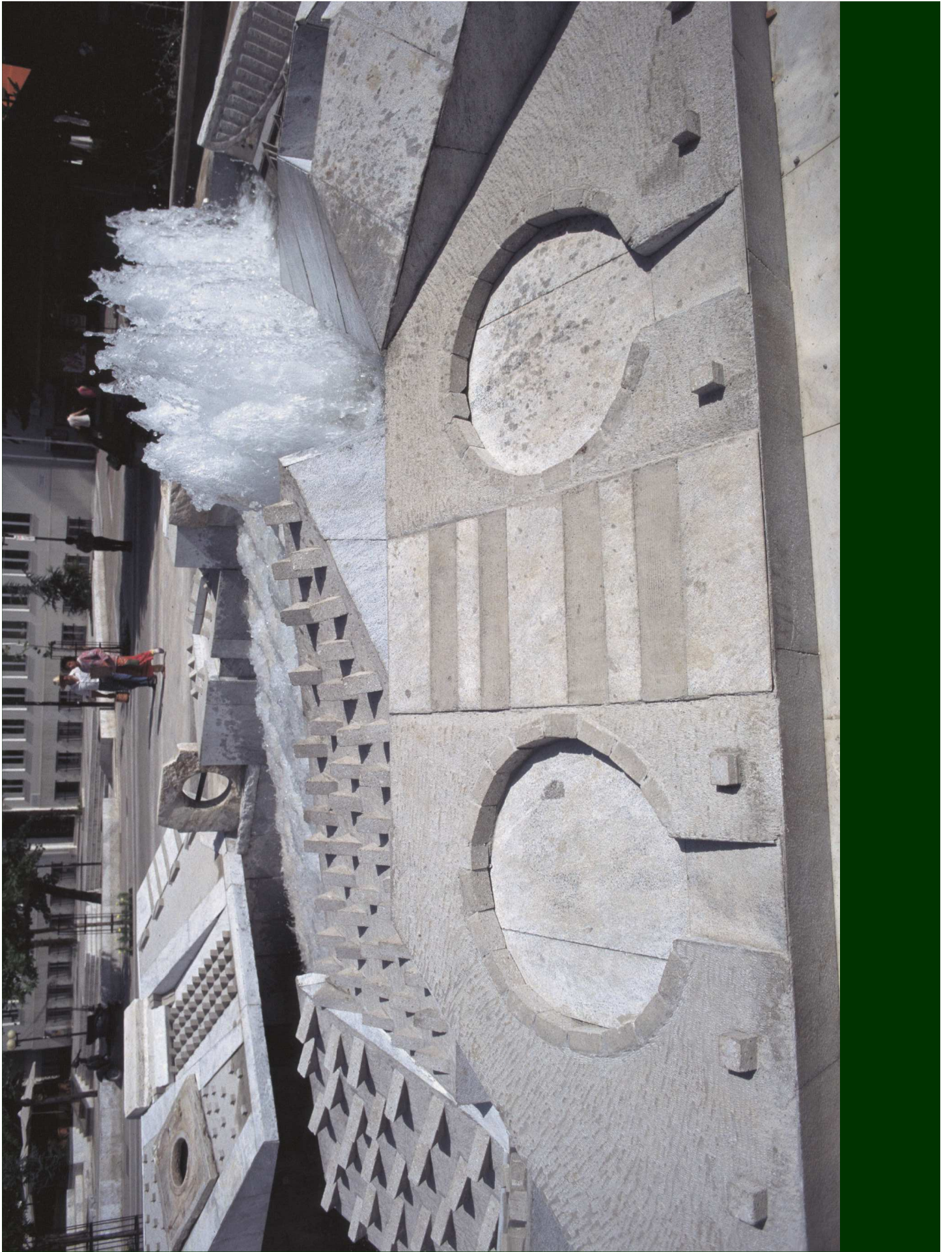
Special emphasis in my Art Total interventions was given for the emergence of forgotten everyday experiences and relations of living in the riverside and the benefit of the waters through the line of time. On the other hand, the presence of the rhythms of the plantations and the agriculture procedures in the famous fertile Thessalian Plain help the awareness especially of children about their natural, geographical and historical position.



During the construction of the squares, as the Pinios River reenters to city life, many clubs are created, such as "Friends of mythological Pinios", "Women and the river", and many annual riverside festivals with nominal tributes to the Nymphs of Pinios and the mythical surroundings take place. The reconstructing of the boundaries of Pinios River bed is completed and a new bridge is constructed in the place of the old one, destroyed by war. The city now recovers its riverside front where new interesting buildings are constructed and a new riverside green pedestrian route is created. In addition, due to the configuration of the Pinios waters, birds came back to the city. According to a recent poll in Greece, Larissa was found to be the most beloved city from its residents; a vision and a goal set by many worthy Mayors during the recent years. Now the city of Larissa is candidate for European Capital of Culture 2021!

A line of the Nobel Prize awarded poet **George Seferis** comes to mind:

**“Let the children play with the ashes”**









All the material belongs to the archives of “Sculpted Architectural Landscapes© N Golanda + A Kouzoupi” and was organized, for the participation in the European ECLIC Program of the **European Landscape Convention (ELC)** “*Making European Policy Popular through Challenge, Learning, Innovation, Cooperation: An experiment on the Landscape Convention / E-CLIC - GOOD PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF LANDSCAPE POLICIES Greek case studies*”, by Dr. Aikaterini Gkoltsiou – Landscape Architect, in collaboration with PRISMA, with the title: “**Total art operations for the reestablishment of the natural, historical and cultural landscape of the city of Larissa**”, and was described as one of the most outstanding good practices of urban landscape in Greece, showing a successful increase in awareness, participation and interaction of citizens with the **European Landscape Convention (ELC)**.

**Nella Golanda**

[www.sculpted-architectural-landscapes.gr](http://www.sculpted-architectural-landscapes.gr)

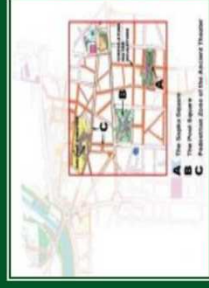
# “Large scale inhabited sculpted public space” In dialog with the broader historical and geographical context

**ECLIC** Challenge Learning Innovation Cooperation

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E-CLIC Case Study #8

Larissa



### **1. Description and context; a brief introduction**

“Total art operations for the reestablishment of the natural, historical and cultural landscape of the city of Larissa”. The project has been promoted by the Municipality of Larissa, and aims to create a new landscape identity for the city based on the enhancement of the ancient Theatre. It intends to do so by involving local communities and revealing the memories of a distinctive agricultural landscape such as the plain of Thessaly with the Pinios river. The project implements the principles defined under the ELC (2010) through local urban planning.

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### **2. Country**

Greece

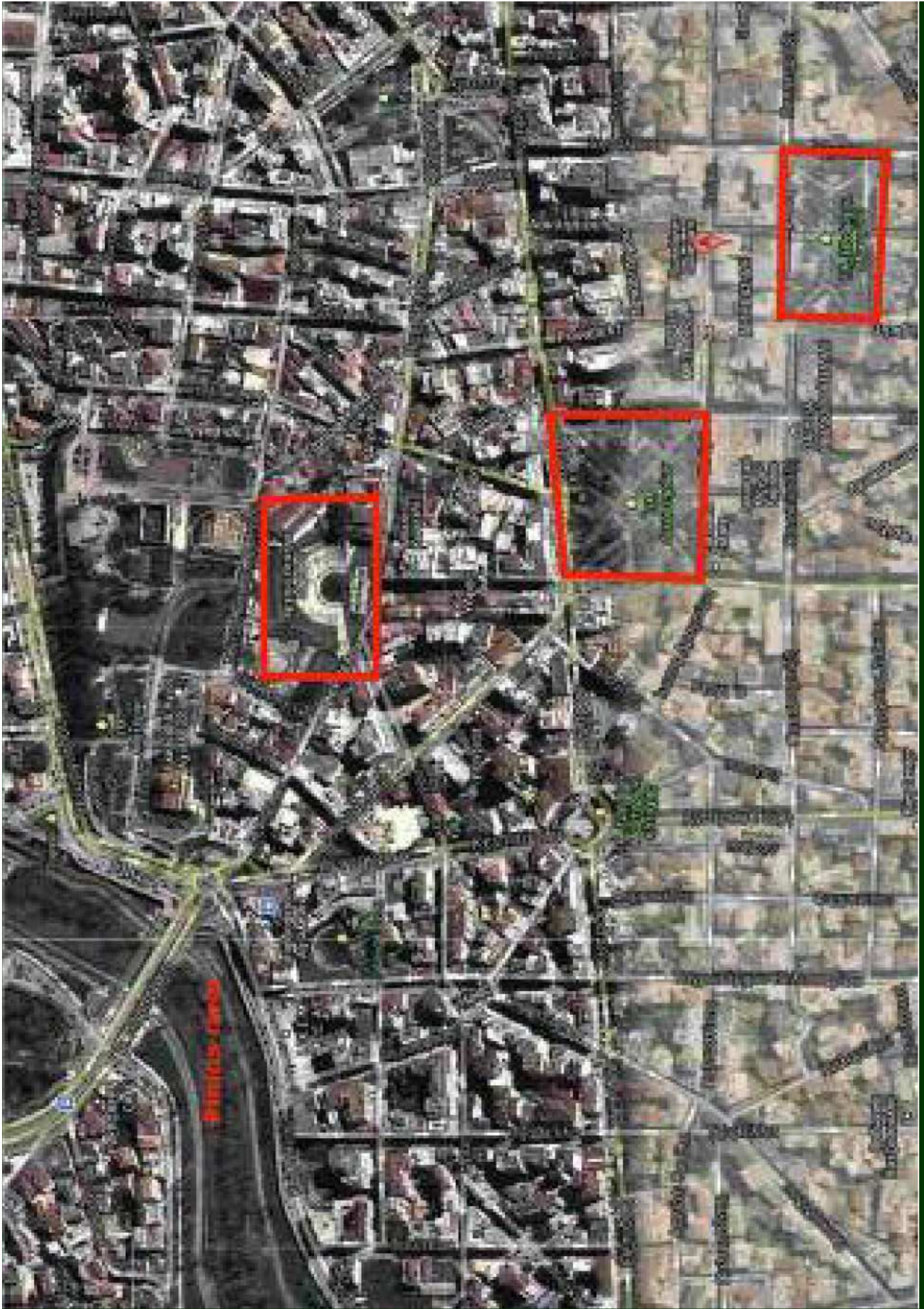
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### **3. Location**

Larissa (Central Greece- Thessaly)

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#### 4. Year

1992 - 2006

#### 5. Landscape Type

Urban

#### 6. Policy associated with (please note if this project is part of a wider sustainable development strategic and political framework)

The project is associated with the general strategic policy of the Municipality of Larissa to reveal the ancient theatre (3rd Century BC) of the city and to reform city centre.

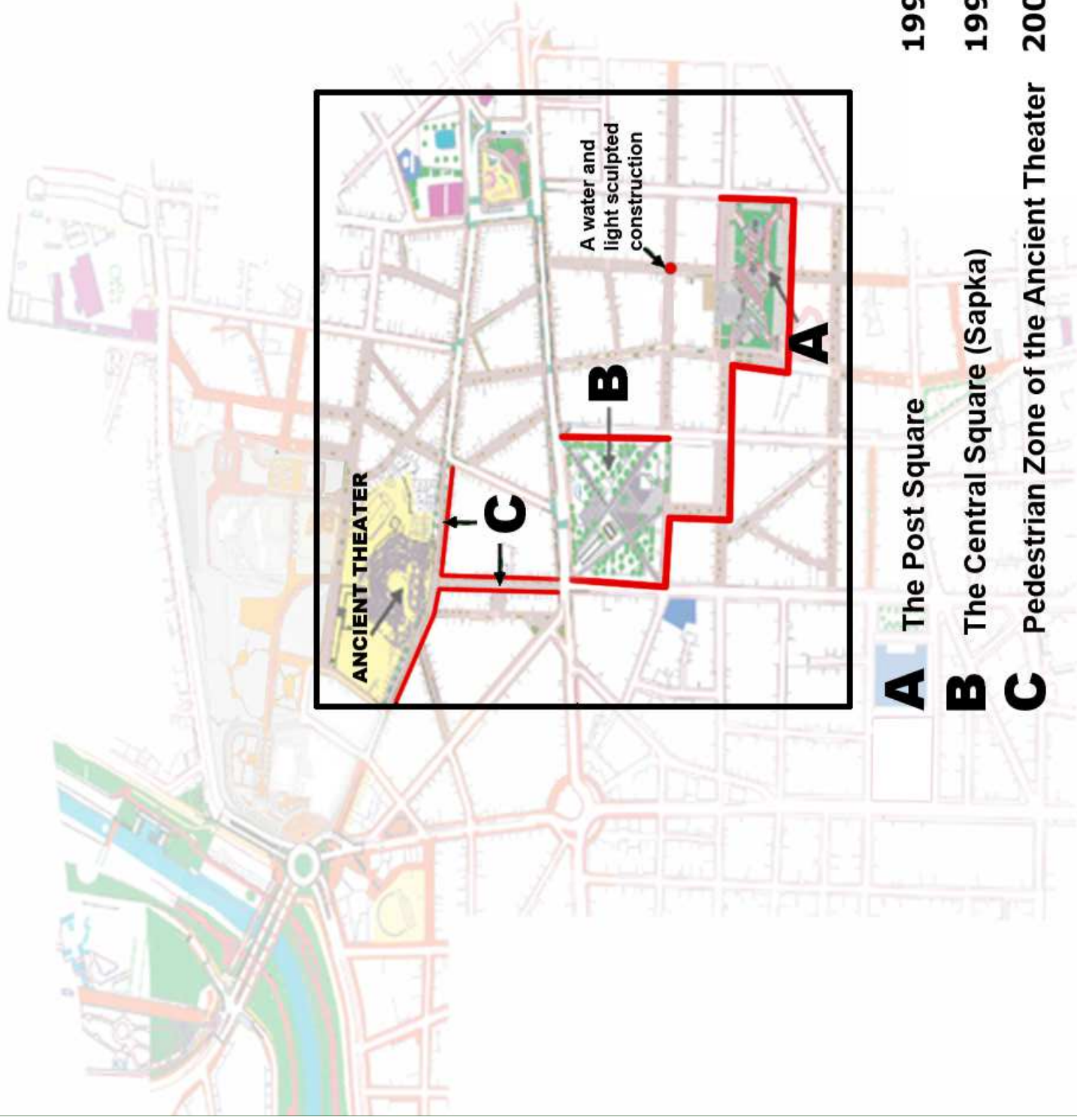
#### 7. Policy target associated with the implementation of the project:

##### 7.1 Type of target

Planning

##### 7.2 Description of the concrete targets

The project aims to create a new identity for the city of Larissa based on the enhancement of the city's Ancient Theatre. The two main squares of the town, the central (Sapka) and Post Office square (Tahidromiou), are included in a holistic design approach, to highlight the temporal historical character of Larissa. To achieve these goals, the masterplan proposes the design of "the sculpted river", marking the lost relationship between the city with its river (Pinios), and emphasizing the different landscape types of Thessaly (the uplands and the lowlands) along its route. The "the sculpted river" flows towards the Ancient Theatre and enables the development of the mountainous and lowland flora of the region.



ANCIENT THEATER

A water and light sculpted construction

**A** The Post Square  
**B** The Central Square (Sapka)  
**C** Pedestrian Zone of the Ancient Theater

1996 - 98  
1992 - 96  
2005 - 06

## **8. Implementing agents**

### **8.1 Main actors involved**

The Masterplan was commissioned and supervised by the Municipality of Larissa, Technical Service Department (Ms Vayoula Tsopanoglou). The townscape project was developed by the Landscape Sculptor Ms Nella Golanda ([www.sculpted-architectural-landscapes.gr](http://www.sculpted-architectural-landscapes.gr)).

### **8.2 Funding**

All funds for the masterplan and implementation of the project have been obtained from the Sectoral Operational Program about Thessaly and from local funding.

### **8.3 Public participation**

A public participation process was embedded through the development of the project, and process of construction. Local craftsmen and art students from the Free Workshop of Fine and Applied Arts of Larissa (Museum Katsigra) were involved during the construction of mosaic duplicates of the originals, which were found during the excavation of the center of Larissa.



## **9. Contributions to the specific measures proposed by the ELC**

Awareness Raising

### **10. The challenge**

The challenge is to enhance public awareness of the historical landscape of Larissa, and to achieve sustainable development based on a balanced and harmonious relationship between social needs, economic activity, culture and the environment. It aims to alter the landscape character of big cities and to raise consciousness amongst citizens of the local historical characteristics of their town. A further challenge is to educate people, especially children, that the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone.

### **11. The solution**

#### **11.1 Measures and actions proposed to address the project challenges**

An aim of the Masterplan is to increase people's awareness about the relationship of the city of Larissa with its historical and mythical Pinios River (e.g. floods, natural disasters and bombings) and to re-establish this connection. It also aims to "prepare" the city centre for the accommodation of the revealed Ancient Theatre, which is located a short distance from the central square.





i) Post office square represents the strong water flows from the mountains of Thessaly, guided by three sections of the “sculpted river” (local loops) to the Ancient Theatre. It represents the landscape of the uplands of Thessaly. The plant species have been to create an appropriate atmosphere. The designer has emphasised the archaeological value of the city’s underground by incorporating 24 replicas of floor mosaics, from the Archaeological Museum, into areas of seating. Information points are located close to the seating, providing details about the address (name and number of the street), where these are found, and the year of their excavation.





















ii) Central (Sapka) square represents the landscape of lowlands of Thessaly and is designed to create an impression of this type of landscape. The planting design has taken account of the choice of plant size, and here the river appears with high strong waterflow providing the potential of light refraction, during the day and night.









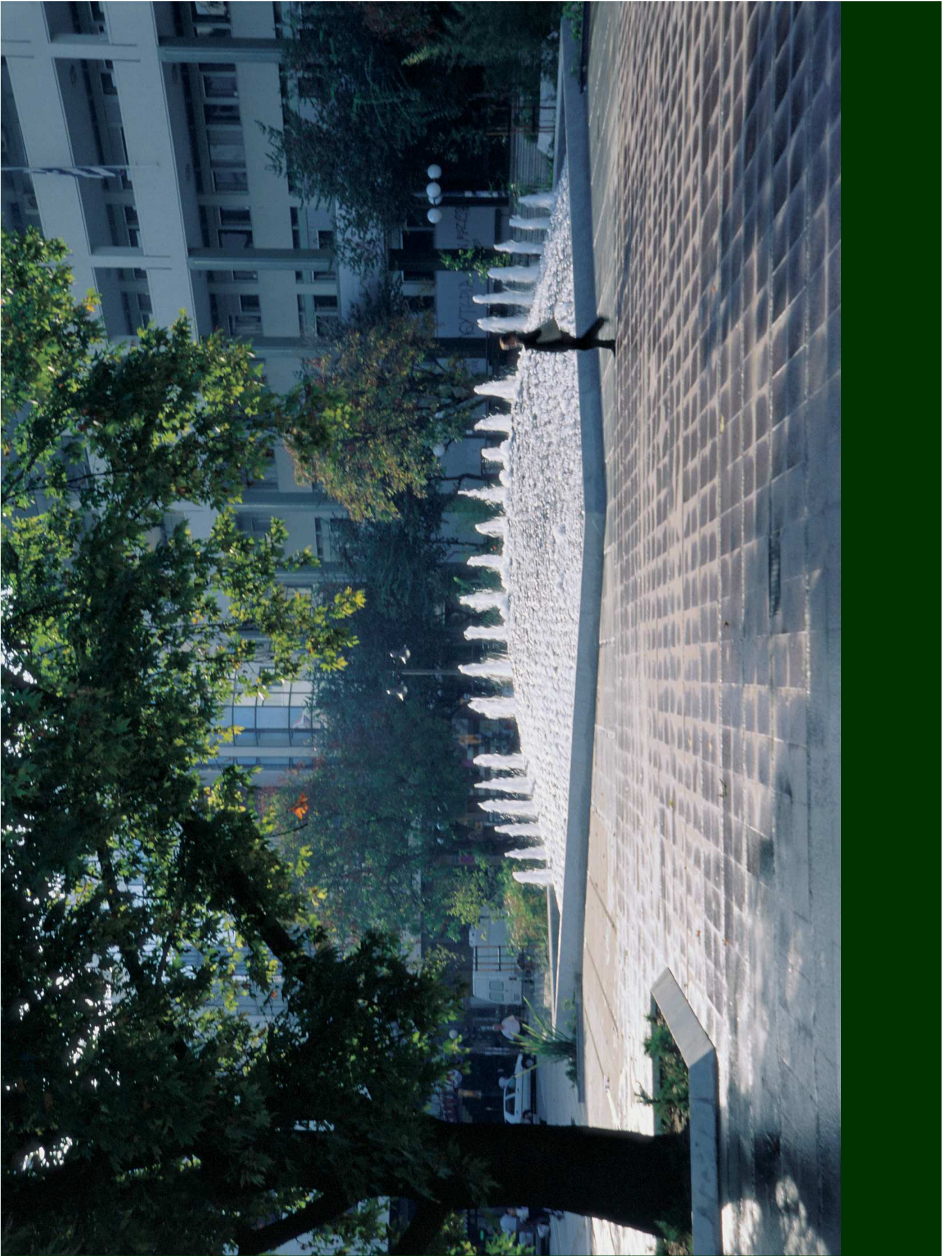








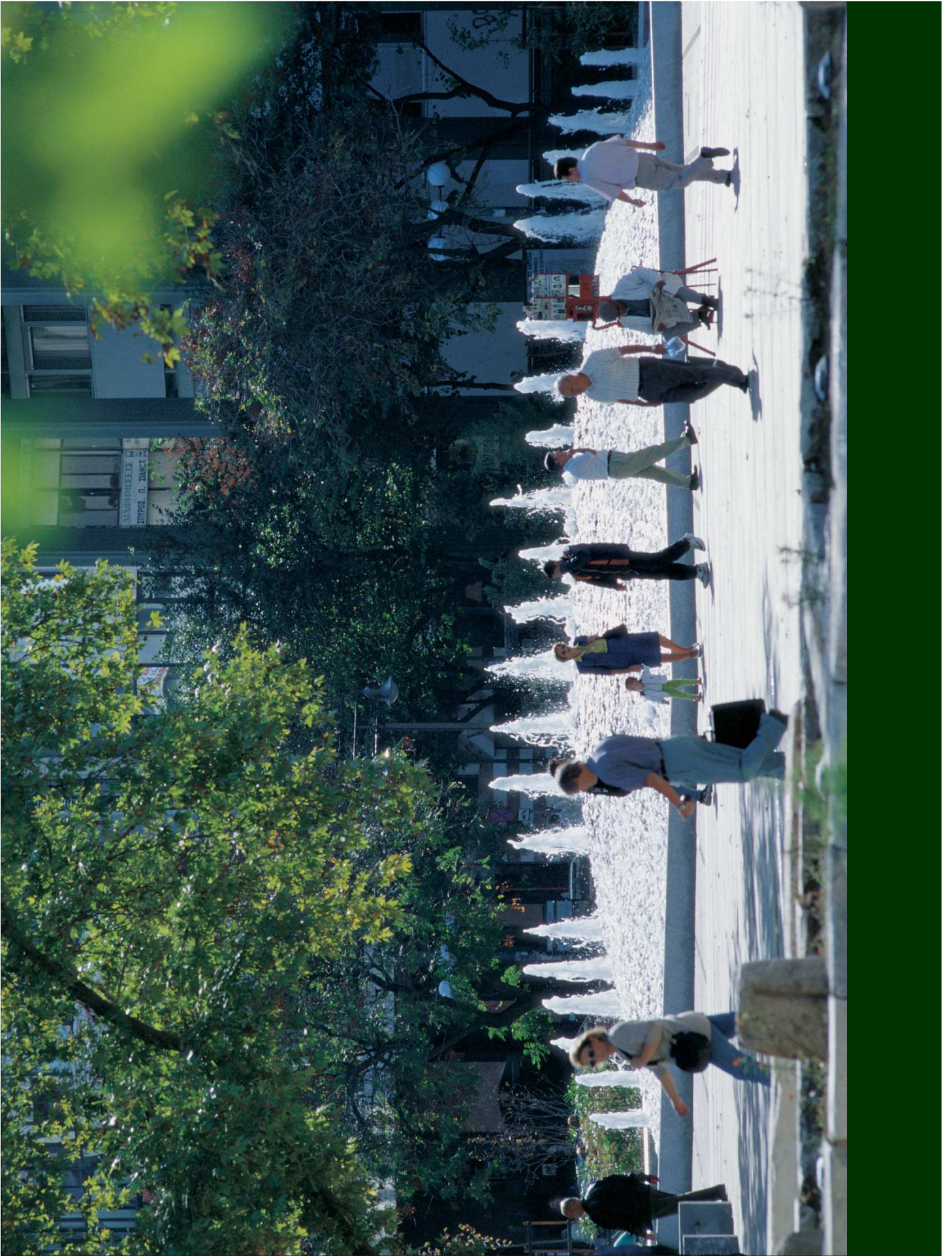




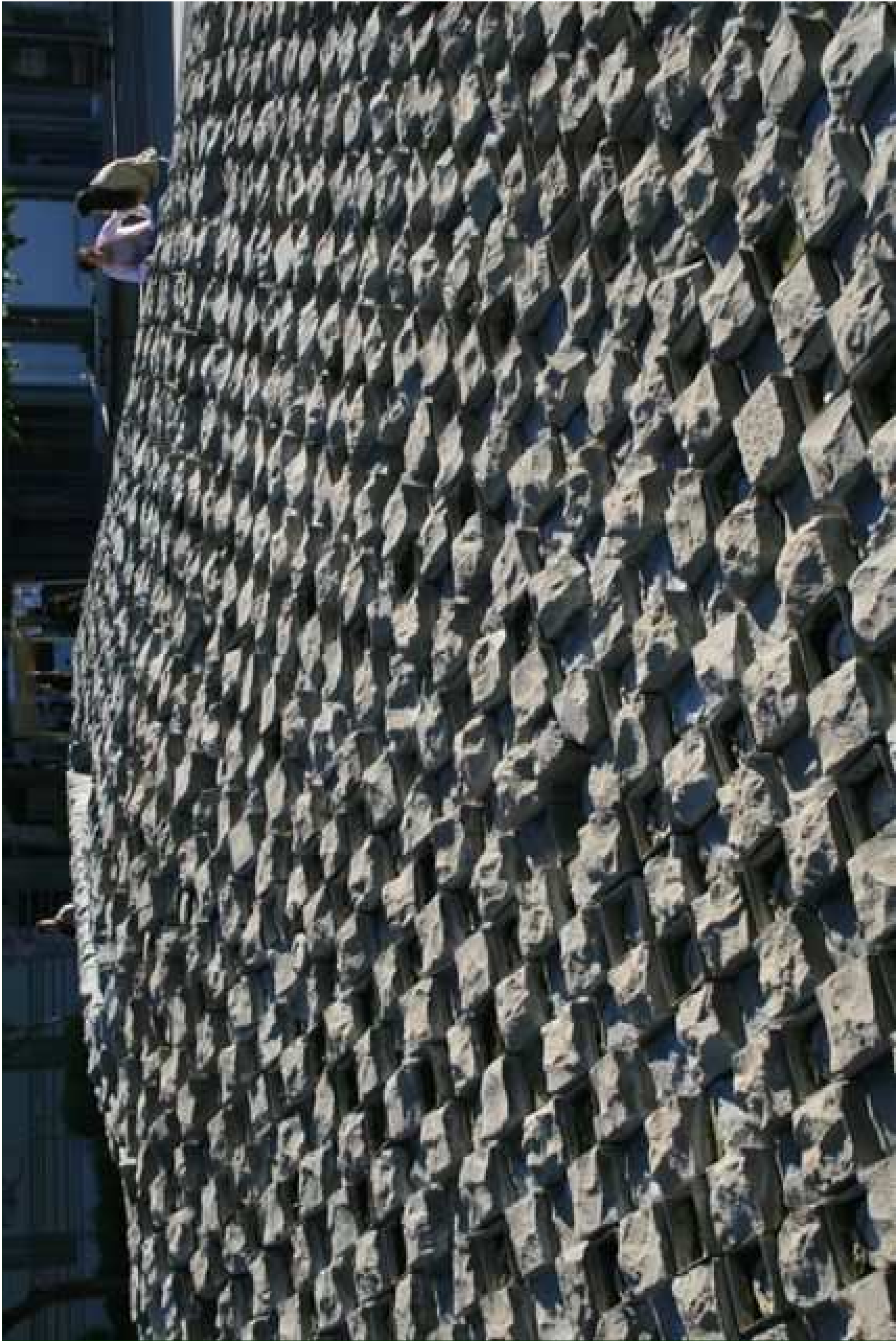
The design of the features is to be consistent with the intended perspective, with benches designed in the form of bails of straw and lamp posts at an appropriate height.

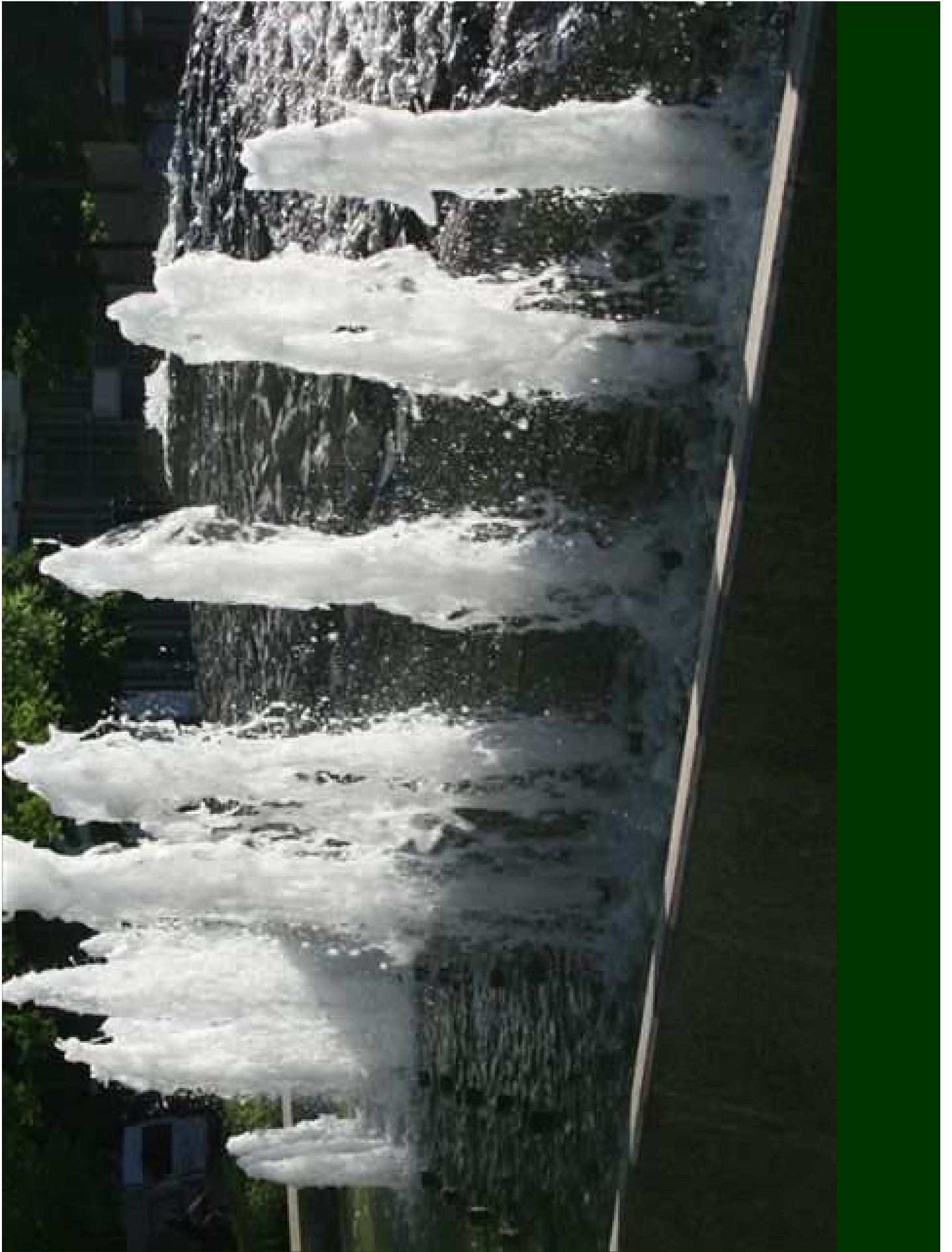
The “sculpted river” is designed to convey a sense of the archaeological richness of the city, penetrating both the squares and giving the impression that the river crosses the city underground.

















iii) The Ancient Theatre was highlighted by the holistic design of pedestrian improvements. The pavement design represents the groundplan of ancient buildings existing underground the city of Larisa, originating from the Neolithic era, through the Classical and the Byzantine Periods, creating a palimpsest of the presence of different civilizations.

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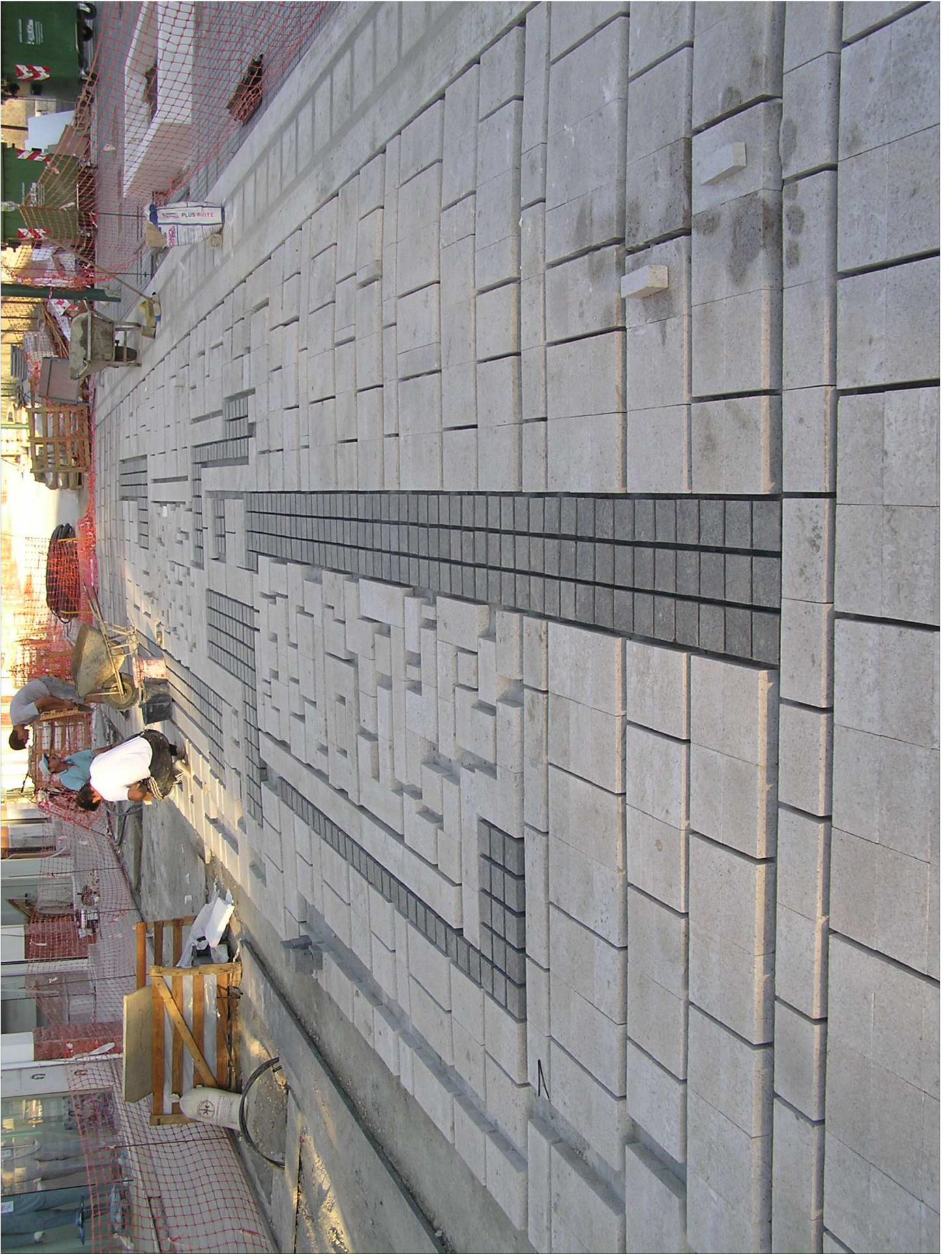








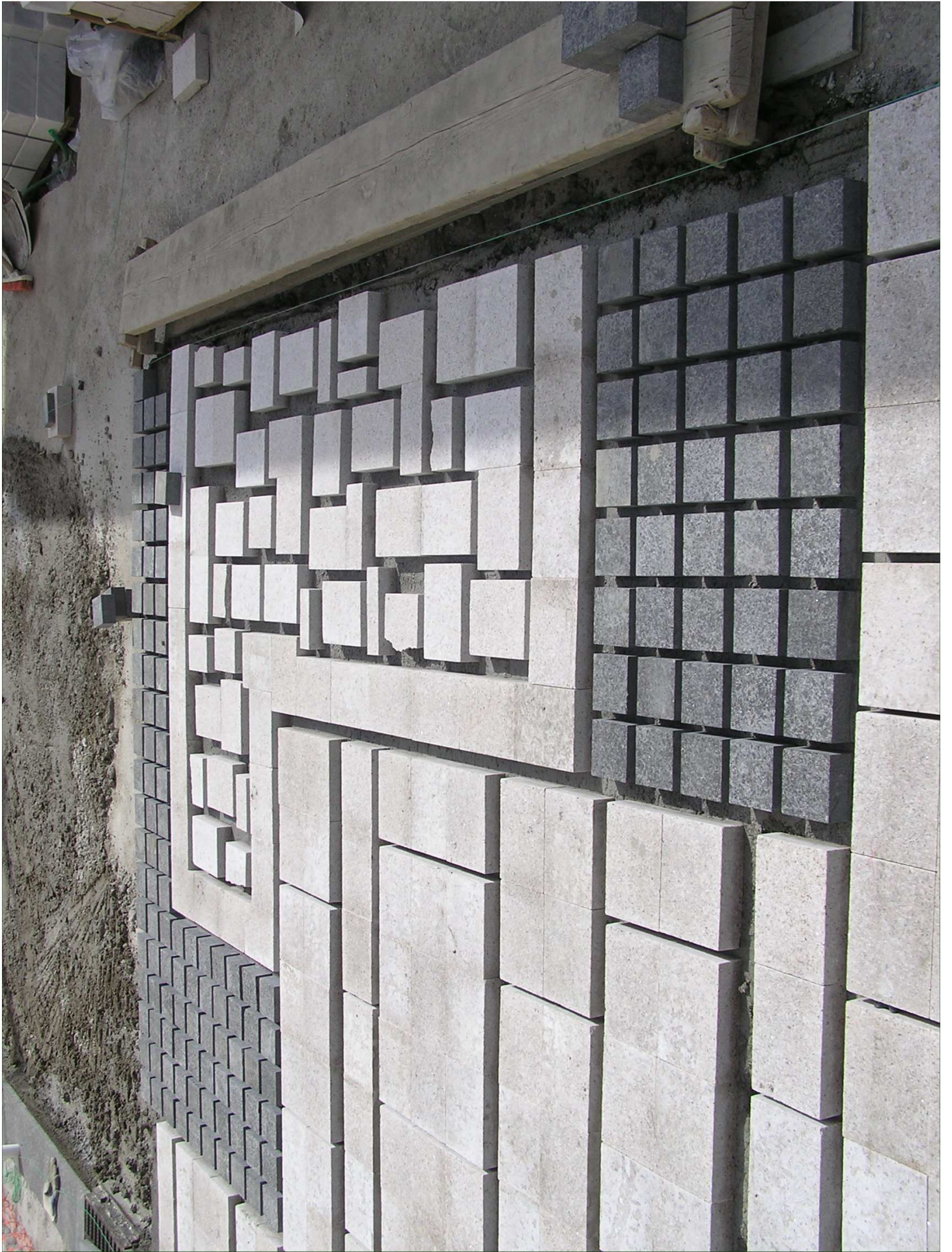


















### **11.2 Degree of success in achieving the challenges**

The biggest success was that Larissa has become the city in Greece which is the most beloved amongst its citizens, with a number of cultural thematic events along the Pinios River, and new groupings created with an aim of protecting of river's history and landscape. In 2008, the pedestrianisation project of the Ancient Theatre was granted the first award of landscape architecture of archaeological sites by the Greek Association of Planners. In 2011, SADAS (the Panhellenic Union of Architects) organised a congress in Larissa with the title "Water: an important design tool for the contemporary cities".

### **11.3 Main factors in the consecution of proposed objectives**

The involvement of local communities throughout the process of the project.

## 12. Methodology proposed to reach the expected solution

### 12.1 Instruments used

The landscape design process of the project involved the following steps:

- Identify and evaluate the present situation of the landscape and the buildings
- Analyze the relationship of the historical centre with Pinios River in a broader geographical context
- Assess the elements and characteristics of the landscape of Thessaly
- Develop a master plan presenting the design concept based on total art

The primary design key concepts are:

- Human scale and local daily lifestyle incorporated into the design
  - Space is treated as a habitable sculpture, creating the sense of a total art
  - The new landscape becomes a landmark
  - Exploration through design of the natural phenomena and rhythms
  - Dialogue between historical and natural environment
  - Revealing of the lost way of life in Mediterranean public spaces
  - The experience offered by living in the heart of the total art sculptured spaces contributes to a daily communication with art, as well as enhancing human relations among the inhabitants and especially among children.
- The key proposals, as identified in the Masterplan, seek to promote the historical identity of the city of Larissa and to re-establish the connection of the city with its river by a number of redesigned public spaces. Within these proposals, three public spaces have been designed in relation to each other and to the river. These projects of “art total” create an art consciousness among the users and especially the children, increasing awareness of the value of landscapes.

### 12.2 Participation process involved

In addition to the strong participation of local craftsmen and art students, this project is a good example of participation, supervision and management led by the public authority.







### 13. Lessons learnt

This project is an example of good practice of cooperation, in this case between the designer, the local authority and the citizens of Larissa. It illustrates that projects which obtain the participation of the general public, and local and regional authorities can prove successful. With active participation of the interested parties, as advocated by the ELC, it was more viable to identify this particular landscape throughout its territory. People realized that after this project their life has been improved, environmental restoration achieved, and tourism increased.

### 14. Key References

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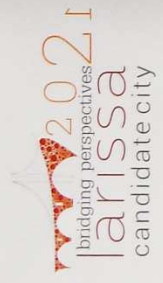
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A DOT



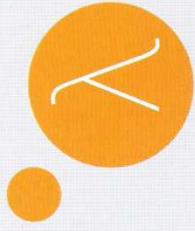
WHERE IS YOUR CITY?  
MARK IT ON THE MAP  
**bridging cities**  
connecting dots



**THIS IS MY CITY**

larissa is the capital and larger city of the thessaly region of greece | population 146.926 | area 335,15 km<sup>2</sup> | elevation 67 m





## MISSION

Larissa is a city wide open to new currents of thought that cultivate people's perception about life, creativity and progress. Larissa is a candidate Cultural Capital of Europe for 2021. Its bid echoes 8.000 years of uninterrupted history and culture and is inspired by the astonishing works of its people since ancient times.

Over the following few years Larissa is to become a hub for creative people, artists and visionaries, coming from every corner of Europe, to explore new ways of cooperation, to jointly design innovative cultural initiatives and programs, to reflect on the future of the city and to foster dialogue about the cultural and social challenges lying ahead for our continent.

We invest in culture for its aesthetic and intervening elements, for its potential to embody and celebrate the spirit of our age, for its ability to open up new roads of thinking and understanding.

## BRIDGING PERSPECTIVES

Larissa's proposal entails an array of cultural exchanges among the past the present and the future, among older and younger generations, between memory and experience, between cultural heritage and modern art, between tradition and innovation born from scientific knowledge.

As a Cultural Capital of Europe, Larissa will bridge people, ideas, narratives, traditions and perceptions into a novel cultural paradigm. Progressive manifestations in knowledge, creation and art will be sought. Fresh aspects and perspectives of collective identity will be explored.

The bridge of perspectives connects with the essence of Europe and delves into its common heritage and shared future. The bridge of perspectives will capture the elusive European identity which is constantly redefined by the diversity of national traditions.

# CULTURE IS IN THE CITY'S DNA

## culture of land

Surrounded by blessed and fertile land, Larissa is built on the shores of the ancient Pineios river right beneath Olympus, the mount of Gods. The uniqueness of this place lies in the exhilarating flavors of the Thessaly cuisine that tells a story inspired by the land. Larissa is the nymph of the meadow, holding the key to the granary. To honour such traditions and narratives a new concept Museum of Wheat and Flour will soon open its gates in Larissa.

## ancient drama modern theatre

*With two ancient theatres right at its centre, Larissa is considered the modern birthplace of the ancient drama. The tendency for drama and poetry dates back to the years of the Aevades' reign. The lyrical poets, Pindaros and Anakreon, were hosted in their court. Influential artists and actors keep this tradition alive today. The prolific Thessalikon Theatre is the first regional theatre that was established in modern Greece.*

## art cultural roots

A Municipal Conservatory since 1930 and one of the three symphonic orchestras to be found in Greece. The Municipal Gallery and a Folklore Museum; a Puppet Theatre and a rare Puppet Museum. A Municipal Ballet School and a Timeless Museum; a newly founded cultural hub for artists and creative citizens at the cultural complex of Mylos. Countless amateur performing arts, groups and associations preserving tradition. Culture is in the city's DNA. Every route leads to talent, art and creativity.

## people & thought

Since ancient times the city of Larissa has been the homeland of many influential Greeks. The ancient historian Polykleitos and the philosopher Flonias, who taught Cicero, were both Larissians. The father of medicine Hippocrates and the sophist Gorgias lived for years in the city. Before liberation from the Ottomans, Theokleitos Farmakides and Konstantinos Kourmas, one of the early Fathers of the Nation, inspired the people of Larissa. In recent times, the painter Aginoras Asteriades and the writer M. Karagatsis, a leading figure of the renowned 30s Generation, the doctor and benefactor Georgios Katsigras, whose personal collection of paintings was the founding collection of the Municipal Gallery, the Gourgioates couple, who founded the Folklore Museum, have all shaped the cultural profile of modern Larissa. Their spirit lives on, forever enchanting and inspiring the city and its people.

## art of freedom

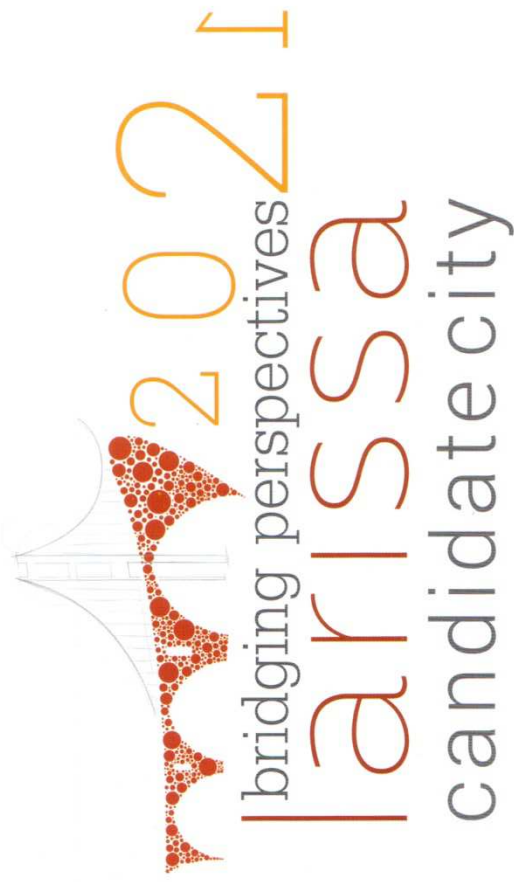
Larissa is a crossroads, a territory in-between. A transit and at the same time an assembling point, the city lives on the flow of people and ideas.

Larissa radiates the aura of freedom and social innovation. From the emancipated woman of the ancient past to the present day cosmopolitan Larissians who bring back fresh ideas to cultivate the present and the future of the city.

[www.larissa2021.eu](http://www.larissa2021.eu)



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